

# It Just Makes Sense The Business Case For Hiring People With Disabilities

May 2018



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# Boosting Your Bottom Line

## By Executive Director Sean T. Casey

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"It's not personal, Sonny. It's strictly business." – Michael Corleone, "The Godfather."

It's a line from the classic 1972 mob movie, and variations are often said in real-life high-stakes financial transactions. But as it turns out, hiring people with disabilities is both personal and business, and it's beneficial from both angles.

From a personal perspective, most business owners, executives and hiring managers will tell you they want to see a diverse workforce that represents the community in which they live. From their professional seats, the same people will tell you they need to make a profit.

Fortunately, both work together. Numerous studies have demonstrated that workers with disabilities profess greater employer loyalty, a much-desired but increasingly uncommon trait among the emerging workforce. Equally uncommon is the employee willing to make a long term commitment on the career front. However, retention rates remain relatively high for people who are disabled, and that leads to savings when it comes to rehiring and retraining.

While quantifiable, savings due to increased employee retention do have an element of subjectivity. But when it comes to tax time, the numbers speak for themselves. Diversifying your workforce with staff who have disabilities could make your business eligible for various tax credits. The federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), according to the U. S. Department of Labor's website, is available to employers for hiring those who have historically faced barriers to unemployment. In dollars and cents, this means those businesses that

recruit and retain people with disabilities may be eligible for anywhere from \$1,200 and \$9,600 back from the IRS.

Another tax credit should also serve to alleviate any concerns employers have about potentially costly building modifications to improve accessibility. The Barrier Removal Tax Deduction covers up to \$15,000 a year in expenses related to accessibility both of physical structures and transportation.

Examples of eligible expenses include costs associated with widening doorways or restriping for more wheelchair accessible parking spaces. It can be used in combination with the Disabled Access Credit, which targets smaller employers. If your business generates \$1 million or less in a calendar year and you have fewer than 30 people on staff, check with the IRS to find out how accessibility improvements can mean another deduction.

These tax credits are major talking points for the Employment Services team at Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency which cultivates business relationships and develops pipelines to meet the need for a supply of qualified candidates. Most employers will readily acknowledge the desire to hire people who historically may have encountered more professional barriers, but hiring isn't charity, nor do people with disabilities expect it to be when they come to the table with significant skills to offer.

What is desired by both the business and the potential employee is financial advancement. Educating yourself on the benefits of available tax credits makes that possible.





# Employment First is Law

## It Recently Got the Governor's Signature

Governor Nathan Deal recently signed into law Georgia's Employment First Act (HB 831), which promotes employment as the first and preferred option offered to people with disabilities receiving government funded services.

The Act creates a 14 member council, to be administered by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) and chaired by GVRA's Executive Director. The group will be comprised of people with various disabilities, a family member of an individual with a disability, and representatives from state agencies involved in workforce development. Its purpose is to produce biannual reports that make policy and legislative recommendations promoting successful Employment First implementation.

"On the state level, we are committed to making Georgia the best place in which to work, learn and call home for all people," said Gov. Nathan Deal. "Time and again, our diverse and vibrant workforce makes significant contributions to Georgia's economy and strengthens our distinction as the No. 1 state for business. With this legislation, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency will have greater support for Employment First implementation, thereby expanding

opportunities for individuals with disabilities and benefitting communities across the state."

In states where Employment First has been implemented, employment rates of individuals with disabilities have increased significantly. GVRA's Executive Director, Sean T. Casey acknowledged the multiplier effect.

"When you have a person, previously dependent upon government benefits, and they go to work, they get more than a paycheck," Casey said. "They get a sense of pride because now they can contribute financially to their households. They develop social networks where previously, they may have been isolated. And the money they earn gives them spending power to help create stronger economies."

Our commitment to Employment First and the work of implementation begins immediately. Our next step is the development of the Council and selection of members, who will be appointed by the Governor. The Council will begin work as soon as this summer, with Crystal Perry, GVRA's WIOA and Compliance Director and longtime Employment First expert, leading the implementation.





Governor Nathan Deal signs the Employment First Act in early May.



# GVRS at RWS

## Board Members Recently Toured the Campus



GVRA Board members toured the Roosevelt Warm Springs campus after their meeting in early May. Here are several photos from the tour.



# All About Occupational Therapists

## How OTs Serve Our Clients

By RWS Driver Education Program Director Kathleen Allgood

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Every April marks Occupational Therapy Month, and in honor of it, here are some things you probably didn't know about the profession and how occupational therapists (OTs) serve our clients.

As a practice, occupational therapy is a health and rehabilitation profession designed to help people regain and build skills to achieve independence in their lives despite disabilities. The American Occupational Therapy Association defines an occupational therapist as someone who "helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations). Common occupational therapy interventions include helping children with disabilities to participate fully in school and social situations, injury rehabilitation and providing supports for older adults experiencing physical and cognitive changes."

The term "occupation" in occupational therapy does not simply refer to jobs or job training. It refers to all activities that occupy people's time and give meaning to their lives.

OT's work in hospitals, schools, client homes, community settings, industry and many other settings. Occupational therapy is an integral part of establishing self-care abilities, homemaking, job adaptations, safe access to home/work environments, as well as leisure.

GVRA employs five occupational therapists. Roosevelt Warm Springs has two occupational therapists—Kathleen Allgood and Katy Abney—who work in the Driving

Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program to help students with independent driving skills. With the help of dedicated driving instructors Donna Davis, Jacara Searles and Ronnie Chapman, many students have earned permits and licenses.

The Assistive Work Technology team (AWT) has three occupational therapists. April Evans Moseley, Lakisha Wilborn and Shannon Alexander. April (Augusta) and Lakiesha (Savannah) serve the East and South quadrants respectively. Shannon has recently joined the West quadrant AWT team and is based out of Newnan.

The AWT occupational therapists provide consultation on complex medical cases and evaluate clients for their assistive technology needs including orthotics & prosthetics, setting and mobility, ergonomics and vehicle and home modifications.

The AWT OT's can also be consulted to determine if a vocational goal is appropriate for the client by comparing the client's ability and medical restrictions to that of the physical and cognitive demands of the core functions of the job. From there, they identify appropriate assistive technology solutions and therapeutic strategies that would help the client find success in the workforce.

Last year marked the 100th year that occupational therapy has been a profession! We are fortunate to have these professionals in our workforce!





# Get to Know a Legislator

## This Month We Feature Wendell Willard

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State Representative Wendell Willard represents the 51st District in the Georgia House of Representatives.

Since being first elected to serve in 2001, Representative Willard has been instrumental in passing several pieces of landmark legislation. Since 2005, Representative Willard has served as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Chairman Willard's notable legislative accomplishments during his time with the General Assembly include the 2006 passage of Georgia's Eminent Domain law, which strengthened personal property rights for all Georgians, and the 2004 Child Protection Law, which protects children against reckless and abusive caregivers.

Chairman Willard also points to the 2005 creation of the City of Sandy Springs, his hometown, by the General Assembly and the subsequent creation of the cities of

Johns Creek and Milton among his most notable accomplishments.

His more recent legislative accomplishments include the complete re-writing of the Georgia Evidence Code, 2011, and his sponsorship of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act in 2013, which aims to help save Georgia's youth from further criminal involvement. In recognition of his legislative accomplishments, Chairman Willard has been honored numerous times, including by the Georgia Council on Aging, the Department of Human Resources, the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia and the Georgia Municipal Association as a "Champion of Georgia's Cities."

In 2013, Representative Willard was honored by the State Bar of Georgia with the "Lifetime Achievement Award," which is presented annually to a member of the Bar for his or her service to the Bar and community. He was also recognized for his service to the children of Georgia as recipient of the Big Voice for Children Award.

Representative Willard resides in Sandy Springs with his wife Vicki. When not working at the Capitol, Representative Willard is an attorney in his own private practice and serves as the City Attorney for Sandy Springs. Active in the Sandy Springs and North Fulton communities, Representative Willard serves on the board of The Newtown Park Foundation.

Representative Willard serves as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, an Ex-Officio on the Judiciary Non-Civil Committee and also serves on the Appropriations, Ethics, Rules and Ways and Means committees.





# The Connection Hub

## Volume Three

By Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer Raj Gandy

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The Office of Strategy & Innovation (S&I) has been busy providing support to various units within the agency and is excited to report our latest news.

The S&I unit had a great second meeting with staff of Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) on March 27 to finalize their strategic plan. The half day meeting was very productive, and we left Bainbridge excited about the future for GIB.

Strategy Manager, Robin Blount was able to finalize a draft of their final plan by April 11th.

S&I has worked to finalize the Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) strategic plan and presented at the most recent GVRs board meeting on May 3 on the RWS campus.

The S&I unit finalized the strategic plan for the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) on April 18, which will mean we will have completed three of the five strategic plan goals we set at the beginning of the fiscal year.

The S&I unit was happy to advise and provide support in the completion of the VR state audit response. Many leadership staff pulled together to ensure a detailed response was provided.

We are now working with the auditors to conduct their "follow up" before they forward our response to printing and publication. The follow up meeting was held on April 12.

Grants Manager Joycelyn Fowler is currently working with RWS on trying to obtain grant

funding for a driving simulator. More details will be forthcoming!

Joycelyn has also been working to establish meetings during lunchtime that will allow staff to learn more about the grant process.

Joycelyn is also cultivating relationships with television and film entities for WIOA program opportunities for GVRs clients, researching a grant request on supplemental WIOA implementation effort, actively soliciting The Kirbo Foundation for GIB and actively researching WIOA training opportunities for S&I staff.

Program Evaluator Angel Bryant started her Program Evaluator and Quality Assurance (PEQA) course on April 3.

The course will last a little over one year and will allow Ms. Bryant to obtain all the necessary skills and training needed for efficient and effective evaluation.

Ms. Bryant attended the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) semiannual meeting in Bethesda, Maryland. The S&I staff are now assisting the VR unit with their federal RSA monitoring response.

As a result, the S&I staff met with Transition and Pre-ETS staff to discuss potential responses to the report.



# GVRA Helps Students Succeed Sponsorships at the Annual CTI Conference

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GVRA recently provided sponsorship funding for hundreds of students across the state to attend at the Career and Technical Instruction State Leadership Competition Conference.

The 37th annual conference, held in Rome in mid-April and drawing about 600 students statewide, allowed students to dive deeper into career and technical career fields, helping them better gauge where they might best apply their skills in the workforce.

"Georgia CTI had an amazing 37th Annual State Leadership Competition Conference full of new energy!" said Georgia CTI Executive Director Mary Donahue. "We attribute that energy to the increased number of students that attended this year and that was only made possible by the financial support from GVRA. Thank you so much for making this one of the best yet!"

The most anticipated portion of the

conference featured competitions in various skillsets that feature predominantly in career and technical vocations—skills the students have developed in their Career Pathway classes. These run the gamut from woodworking to construction technology to advertising, and in addition to bragging rights, winners in each category receive cash scholarships.

"This was the most well-attended conference ever in history. This could not have been possible without the VR field staff in the East, West, South and Metro Quadrants. To the field staff, you all did a phenomenal job which allowed students with disabilities to participate in competitions they worked all year long producing," said GVRA Transition Director Lauri Tuten. "Many of your supervisors shared the thank you emails and cards with me, and I was so proud of the VR Staff. It demonstrated the commitment and heart each and every one of you have for students with disabilities."



Some of the students GVRA sponsored at the Georgia CTI State Leadership Competition Conference in April.





# Rep. Tours Project SEARCH

## Rep. Taylor Learned About the Program

Published in the Times Enterprise

Thomas County Schools recently invited state Rep. Darlene Taylor to Archbold Memorial Hospital to learn more about the Project SEARCH program, a high school transition program for young adults with special needs. Project SEARCH students are interns who learn transferable job skills that assist them in finding full or part-time competitive employment.

While visiting Archbold, which partners with the school system, Rep. Taylor toured different departments to see participating students successfully complete their daily tasks. Ashley Finch, Project SEARCH Coordinator, ensures the students receive necessary support with accommodations and on-the-job coaching.



Pictured from left to right are: Donna McMillian, Archbold; Doris Lea, Project SEARCH skills trainer; Derrick Edwards, Herman Curry, Project SEARCH participants; Ashley Finch, Project SEARCH coordinator; State Rep. Darlene Taylor; Chelsea Dolan, VR Counselor; and Dr. Lisa Williams, associate superintendent for Thomas County Schools.





# GIB in DC

## Staff Goes to National Symposium

By GIB Co-Director Luis Narimatsu

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On April 16 through 19, representatives from Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) participated in the NIB/NAEPB National Symposium in Alexandria, VA.

During this year's National Symposium, affiliated agency employees of the year were recognized with numerous events in their honor.

One of the highlights of the Symposium was the opportunity to gather in Washington, D.C. and meet with members of Congress and their staff. GIB 2018 employees of the year Aaron Todd McGough and Jeffery Durham had the opportunity to navigate the halls of both the senate and the house legislative buildings and share their stories with Georgia's elected officials and their staff.



Pictured left to right: Senator Perdue, GIB Employee of the Year In Direct Labor Aaron T. McGough, GIB Maintenance Manager Jesse Whitley, GVRA HR Manager Dawnn Johnson, GIB Employee of the Year in Direct Labor Jeffery Durham, Elizabeth Narimatsu, GIB Co-Director Luis Narimatsu and GIB Co-Director Mike Jackson.



# DAS Employee of the Month Staff Goes to National Symposium

Nomination by Carla Vignoul

We are pleased to nominate Nancie Morley for Employee of the Month. Nancie has been an employee with DAS since 2005. She is currently an Adjudicator in Unit 64. Ms. Morley is a hard worker who is dependable and knowledgeable.

Recently an MC noted to me that she "always has the case so well organized and presents it with such clarity and detail." Another great example: she receives frequent compliments on her overall

understanding of cases. I have noticed that she handles customers in a professional but also compassionate way.

Often if she has extra time during the week, she will offer to assist with cases in the unit. She meets challenges with a positive attitude and is ready to offer a solution to any complaint. Nancie Morley is an exemplary employee, and we are proud to nominate her for Employee of the Month.

## Staff Attends Autism Walk A Few Steps Can Go a Long Way

GVRA staff joined advocates for autism awareness continued their mission here in South Georgia, this time, with a resource fair.

The eighth annual autism awareness resource fair kicked off in Dawson Saturday.

It followed the Autism Walk sponsored by Advocates for Autism Resource Center. Organizers said they want to honor the families and children affected by autism. The expo and resource fair allowed parents with children with autism, to learn about the developmental disorder.

"Leaving today's expo for a parent to let you know that you are not alone and that we are here to support you and we're gonna strive with every effort that we possibly can to support programs and

services that can give our students a better future," said program director Lisa Perry. The fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha had a fundraiser at their tent.

That money will help provide electronics for children with autism.





# Take Your Child to Work

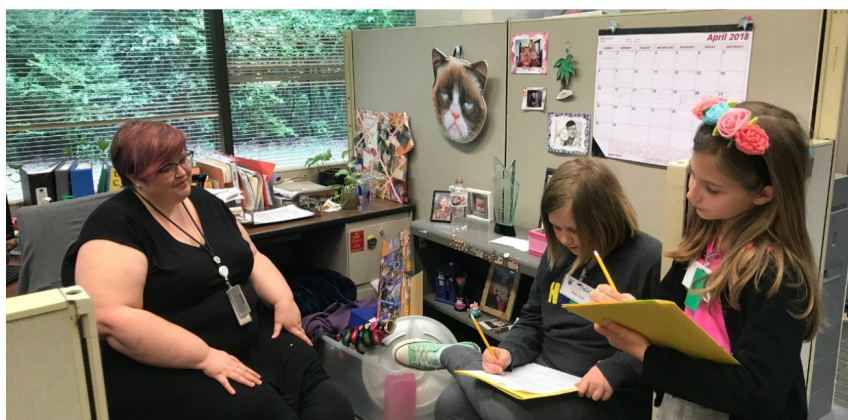
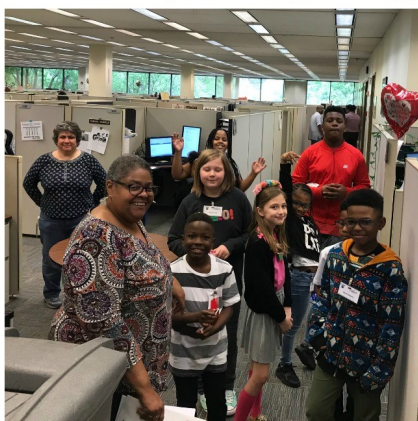
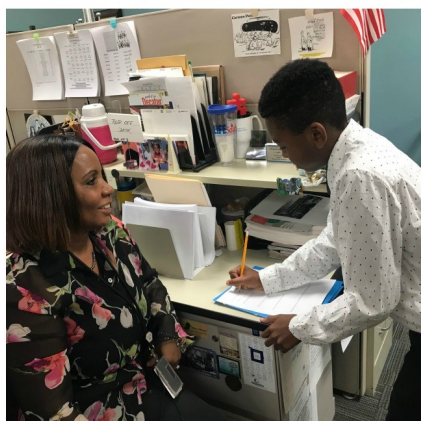
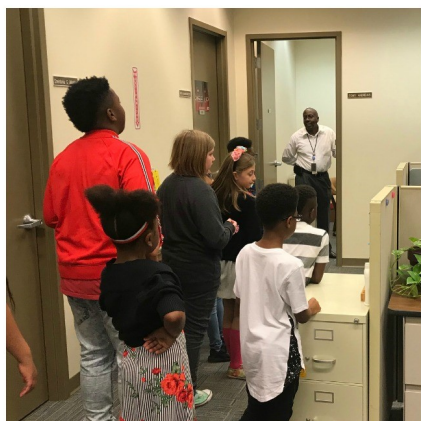
## DAS Welcomes Our Youngest Coworkers

Disability Adjudication Services had 20 student participants from local elementary and middle schools visit our offices in Stone Mountain, Savannah, Athens and Thomasville for Take our Daughters and Sons to Work Day. Activities for the day included an overview of what we do at DAS, an interview with each participant's sponsor about their job duties and a learning demonstration similar to what new

Associate Adjudicators encounter during their classroom training.

A great time was had by all, and staff looks forward to hosting the youngest members of our DAS family again next year!

Special Thanks to Kathy Officer-Fogie for spearheading this event on behalf of the DAS Training Team!





# HSHT Ceremony

## Congrats to Those Recognized!

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GVRA staff and other dignitaries were on hand at the first annual Northeast Georgia High School High Tech (HSHT) Awards Luncheon on April 17th at the Cateechee Golf Club Ballroom. These included Elbert County Comprehensive High School (ECCHS) teachers Kachina Rucker, Cherish Ingram, Don Hurlburt and Daniele Franklin, GVRB Board Vice-Chair Tom Wilson, GA High School High Tech (HSHT) Coordinator Karen Royston, GVRB Board Chair Jimmy Defoor, GVRA Chief External Affairs Officer Katie Womick, NE GA HSHT Regional Outreach & Program Coordinator Sid Jessup and Friends Helping Friends Club, Inc. President / GVRB Board Secretary Sandy Adams (Master of Ceremony).

The program honored student participation from Elbert, Franklin, Hart and Stephens County School Systems in the 2017-2018 HSHT Program, a comprehensive community-based pre-employment transition program for youth with disabilities.

This program provides the bridge to meet postsecondary and career-development goals. During the program, ECCHS Blue Devil 101 (BD101) students presented an impressive PowerPoint about the exciting activities they have participated in this year. Through HSHT, BD101 students were able to visit several job locations to explore career opportunities. Visits included the City of Elberton Sheriff, Fire, and Public Works Department, Water-Treatment facility and Animal Control. Students toured Kroger in Gainesville, Tenneco in Hartwell and Mollertech in Elberton.

Students also participated in Knowledge Beyond the Classroom Training (job readiness training) and Social Media training at Athens Technical College. These visits—funded by HSHT and Friends Helping Friends Club, Inc.—allowed students to learn about the requirements, responsibilities, criteria and duties needed to obtain employment.



# BEP Happenings

## The Latest at the Business Enterprise Program

The 2018 U.S. Air Force John L. Hennessy Awards evaluation team recently visited Wynn Dining Facility managed by Blind Vendor Contract Manager Jim Howard. The facility made the finalist list and the evaluation team was visiting to evaluate Jim and his staffs' culinary excellence. Let us

congratulate Jim for a job well done.

Congratulations to Sandra Wiggins, BEP Warehouse Associate, on her one year work anniversary.

# A VR Success Story

## How One Young Woman Overcame Obstacles

By PRC Sandra Darby

Shatori Jones is a 22-year-old woman who the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency would like to recognize for her accomplishments and success. Shatori graduated from Jones County High School (JCHS) in May 2017. She was a varsity cheerleader for 6 years, and she was the homecoming queen in 2013. She volunteered in the community while in high school, and she was also on the Unified Team (Special Olympic) at JCHS. She participated in basketball, softball, soccer and flag football every year of high school.

When Shatori began in our program, she was very shy and hesitant to talk to people. But she slowly came out of her shell. Shatori participated in a Work Evaluation with Goodwill that gave her training and preparation to enter the workforce.

Ms. Sandra Dardy (her GVRA counselor) met with Fran Holmes, owner of FH Vocational Concept, along with Shatori and her mother Melissa Jones. After their meeting, the team decided to pursue Supported Employment. Shatori was assigned a trainer to review all the basic skills that would assist her in gaining

employment. Ms. Ruth Evanovich, FHVC Associate, assisted Shatori in training and the interview process and she was hired December 14, 2017.

Ruth also assisted Shatori in completing her daily tasks and informed of her American Disabilities Act (ADA) rights. Shatori's mother was very pleased with the relationship that Ruth and her daughter shared. After a couple of weeks on the job, Shatori's confidence level began to rise, and she became more outgoing. She now smiles and talks to customers as she bags their groceries. She takes pride in her work and is often heard saying how much she loves her job.

Shatori's work habits are excellent. She is one of the most positive people that we have worked with here at Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. She is reliable and willing to work when needed. Shatori and Ms. Ruth continue to communicate strategies that allowed her to improve her skills. VR is proud to have been a part of Shatori's success story.

# Jimmy Defoor Retires

## The Longtime Board Chair Steps Down

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Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board Chairman Jimmy Defoor chaired his final meeting in May following his announcement at the previous meeting that he would be retiring. Mr. Defoor served as chairman of the board since its inception in 2012.

At the May meeting, GVRA Executive Director Sean T. Casey thanked Mr. Defoor for his service, presenting him with an award to commemorate his tenure (pictured below).

"I've never met a person more dedicated to people with disabilities, nor could I have asked for a better role model, father figure, or mentor," Executive Director Casey said.

"You've been an inspiration to all of us, and we'll continue doing our work in your honor."

Defoor retired as assistant commissioner over rehabilitation services in the Georgia Department of Labor. He served as division director of rehabilitation services in the Department of Human Resources. He earned a bachelor's degree in Education and a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Georgia.

Defoor is a member of the National Rehabilitation Association and past president of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association. He and his wife, Aurena, have three children and eight grandchildren.





# New GVRs Board Officers

## Here Are the New Officers for the Next Year

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Earlier this month, Tom Wilson, Faye Perdue, and Sandy Adams assumed, or were voted to continue in, current key leadership roles.



**Tom Wilson, Board Chairman**

Tom Wilson, a more than 40-year veteran of vocational rehabilitation services, was unanimously voted the new Chairman of

the GVRs Board. Tom is just completing a three year term on the GVRs Board, but his relationship with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) began when he was a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). After multiple promotions and his retirement, the fire still burned deep, leading him to return part time to continue to counsel clients. He assumes the role of Chairman after serving as Vice Chairman. He was also integral to the passage of legislation that created GVRA, previously a department under another state agency. When asked why vocational rehabilitation means so much to Tom, he replied, "From the very start, my work has always seemed meaningful to me. When you are interacting with the people and the intimate details of their life, that makes the mission very real."



**Faye Perdue, Vice Chairman**

Faye is the GVRs Board's newest member, but her colleagues have been immediately impressed with her dedication. She is an insurance agent for State

Farm, but her roots grow deep at Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS). She was previously a senior vocational rehabilitation counselor for the Independent Living Skills Training

Program, and before that, a senior disability adjudicator. Perdue is secretary of the Three Rivers Regional Commission, a member and past president of the Rotary Club of Meriwether County and a member and former chairperson of the Meriwether County Chamber of Commerce. She is also a graduate of Leadership Meriwether. Perdue earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology and a master's degree in

Guidance Counseling from the University of West Georgia.



**Sandy Adams, Secretary**

Sandy Adams was just voted to serve another term as the GVRs Board's

Secretary. She served as the Elbert County Schools Adapted PE teacher and PE Department Chair until retiring in 2013. She is the founding sponsor and president of Friends Helping Friends Club, Inc., a 501(c) 3 charitable organization raising all funds and providing support for Friends Helping Friends Club (FHF), a young 300 student member club at the Elbert County (EC) High School and EC Middle School, which provides exceptional educational opportunities including school trips and special events for students who have special needs. Adams also spent three summers as a fitness instructor for the Governor's Honors Program at Valdosta State University. She is the first teacher in Elbert County to obtain Georgia Master Teacher Certification and is also a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT).

The assume their new roles on July 1.

# A Major Award

## Peggy Comin Honored as Community Champion

By Communications and Marketing Director Robin Folsom

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Sometimes those of us who live and work with family members, friends and colleagues who are blind hear them approach because of the tapping of their guide cane.

With Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Peggy Comin, that's not often the case, because, as her coworkers often joke, wherever Peggy's cane is, that's where Peggy's not.

She is adept at navigating the Marietta Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Office, helping us find our way around when we stopped by to work with a video crew on a segment honoring Peggy as the Tommy Nobis Center's Community Champion. Peggy received the distinction officially, along with a crystal award, at the Center's Galaxy of Stars Luncheon in April.

When we spoke with Peggy in her office earlier, she explained that she credits much of her independence and success as a mother, wife, CRC and published author to her upbringing. Blinded at the age of two in a household accident in which a plumber accidentally splashed lye in her eyes, the traditional route for a child with a disability in those days would have been a special school, separate from her peers. Peggy says her mother wouldn't hear of it.

"I want Peggy to have the exact same experience as all the other children," Peggy quotes her mother.

Her family not only established normalcy in the classroom, but also at play. An early gift was a tandem bike, bought with the idea that her brother would steer and pedal, and young Peggy would ride behind them. But

Peggy wasn't interested in sitting second-seat, being pedaled around. She talked her brother into letting her ride up front and navigate, with his verbal cues. Well-meaning neighbors who had their eye out on the children were curious, if not alarmed, and called her mother.

"What if she falls off?" they asked.

"Then she'll pick herself back up," Peggy's mother replied.

Perhaps Peggy's focus on CAN DO instead of CAN'T is what helps her communicate effectively to her clients. She manages a general caseload, and she says some people find it unusual she doesn't work exclusively with other people who are blind.

"Well, I'm just like everybody else," Peggy explains. "I like working with all kinds of people. You know, people have so many different life experiences, whether it's an accident or a learning disability or an addiction. You become empathetic, and learn to listen."

Says Valerie Carter, Service Area Manager and Peggy's supervisor, "Peggy's passion for what she does spills off into working with her clients. She makes all of us better." "I think helping people find jobs, one by one, is truly campaigning for their rights," Peggy says.

Peggy and her husband, Bill, have two adult children, a son and daughter. She joined Vocational Rehabilitation in 2002, when the program was a division of the Georgia Department of Labor. Sixteen years later, she's as passionate as ever, sharing a quote that keeps her inspired.



Peggy Comin (CRC and Tommy Nobis Center Community Champion Award Winner), Sean Casey (GVRA Executive Director), Lauren Knox (VR Director), and Bernadette Amerein (Assistant VR Director-Metro) enjoying the Galaxy of the Stars Awards Luncheon. Below, Governor Nathan Deal speaks at the ceremony.





# A Special Thank You

## On State Employee Appreciation Week

By Executive Director Sean T. Casey

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*Editor's Note: State Employee Appreciation Week took place May 7 through May 11. This memo from Executive Director Sean T. Casey went out that week.*

As most of you may already know, this week has been officially designated as State Employee Appreciation Week, with the intention of recognizing the efforts and contributions of those who serve throughout state government.

I'll venture out on a limb and respectfully say, I don't plan to view this week any differently than any other.

Before I'm accused of taking the Scrooge approach to leadership, I want each of you to know I've had more than a year and a half to reflect on how much I appreciate each of you. This is a large boat we're all on. I believe, in the last twenty months, its course has changed for the better. That's because of all of you, and I think very often about your role in effecting positive change.

It's appreciated year round, not just during one week.

Our Office of Human Resources is working hard to plan fun events for staff at 200 Piedmont over the next few days, and I encourage other locations to do the same. However, I also encourage each of you to maintain that atmosphere of appreciation throughout the year. I enjoy my job and want each of you to feel the same. I promise you, a card expressing gratitude for a coworker's help with a major project or a quick email complementing someone's dedication or accomplishment means much more than you imagine.

This week and every day, I'm honored to call you all my colleagues. I look forward to continuing our work, making the lives of those we're privileged to serve better.

Thank you for allowing me to serve alongside you.

## AWARE Update

### The New System is Live

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As many of you know, GVRA recently transitioned to a new client management system called AWARE this year.

The client management application went live on May 7th (College Park and Augusta) and May 8th (statewide).

In order to capture any concerns/issues from field staff using the new system, a mailbox has been created. To send an email

regarding AWARE, please address it to [awarequestions@gvs.ga.gov](mailto:awarequestions@gvs.ga.gov).

Many people worked very hard to get this new system up and running (namely, anyone in Deborah McCloud's Business Applications Department), so if you see someone who helped make this project a success, please congratulate them.

GVRA staff represented Georgia at the recent CSAVR Conference in Washington, D.C. From left are Lauren Knox, Ruby Kaspar, Robin Folsom, Ken Hise, Katie Womick, Shelley Kraft and Minerva Nixon as they stand in front of the U.S. Capitol Building.



# Supported Employment Training

## Make Sure to Save the Date

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Supported Employment Training will soon be offered in six different locations across the state for employees. CRC credits will be applied for. There is the potential for four CRC credits for attending a one day session of the class, if approved.

Supported Employment Training is intended to help you ...

- 1) Understand the application of Supported Employment.
- 2) Recognize and apply policies and procedures appropriately.
- 3) Understand the different types of Supported Employment.

SValdosta

May 17 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Athens

May 22 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Macon

May 24 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Cartersville

May 30 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Norcross

May 31 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

If you have questions, contact Lee Davis at [lee.davis@gvs.ga.gov](mailto:lee.davis@gvs.ga.gov).

## A Team Effort

Many people contribute to this newsletter every month. Sometimes they're coworkers, and sometimes they're members of the disability community, and sometimes they're clients themselves. Regardless, it takes a village to make this newsletter a reality every month, and because of the collaborative effort, I believe it serves as a unique and valuable resource.

That said, we're always looking for new content, and we're always looking to optimize what content we have. That's where you come in.

By Communications Manager John Boan

If you have a success story you'd like to share or want to give a kudos to a coworker or a provider who has gone above and beyond in providing services to our clients, please let me know.

You can always email [john.boan@gvs.ga.gov](mailto:john.boan@gvs.ga.gov) with any information you'd like included in the newsletter or any suggestions or criticisms you may have about this newsletter.

As I've said previously, it's your newsletter, and we want to hear from you.

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